

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

THE ALL-TIME BEST SELLING CLASSIC

CHARLES DICKENS

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CAROL

C h a r l e s D i c k e n s

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by Charles Dickens

Published by Tribeca Books

ISBN 978-19365943-44

Printed in the USA

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Cover Photo: dreamstime

Preface

I HAVE endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

Their faithful Friend and Servant,

Charles Dickens

December, 1843

STORY

1

SCENE I. CRATCHIT'S PARLOR. CRATCHIT, MRS. CRATCHIT, and the CHILDREN.

SCENE II. CRATCHIT'S PARLOR. CRATCHIT, MRS. CRATCHIT, and the CHILDREN.

SCENE III. CRATCHIT'S PARLOR. CRATCHIT, MRS. CRATCHIT, and the CHILDREN.

SCENE IV. CRATCHIT'S PARLOR. CRATCHIT, MRS. CRATCHIT, and the CHILDREN.

SCENE V. CRATCHIT'S PARLOR. CRATCHIT, MRS. CRATCHIT, and the CHILDREN.

SCENE VI. CRATCHIT'S PARLOR. CRATCHIT, MRS. CRATCHIT, and the CHILDREN.

SCENE VII. CRATCHIT'S PARLOR. CRATCHIT, MRS. CRATCHIT, and the CHILDREN.

SCENE VIII. CRATCHIT'S PARLOR. CRATCHIT, MRS. CRATCHIT, and the CHILDREN.

STAVE I
MARLEY'S GHOST

STAVE II
THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS

STAVE III
THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

STAVE IV
THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

STAVE V
THE END OF IT

Stave One

Marley's Ghost

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of iron-mongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain.

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet's Father died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in his taking a stroll at night, in an easterly wind, upon his own ramparts, than there would be in any other middle-aged gentleman rashly turning out after dark in a breezy spot—say Saint Paul's Churchyard for instance—literally to astonish his son's weak mind.

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin.

He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often "came down" handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blind men's dogs appeared to know him, and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!"

But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call "nuts" to Scrooge.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite

dark already—it had not been light all day—and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge's nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."

"Come, then," returned the nephew gaily. "What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough."

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said, "Bah!" again; and followed it up with "Humbug."

"Don't be cross, uncle!" said the nephew.

"What else can I be," returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will," said Scrooge indignantly, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!"

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Nephew!" returned the uncle sternly, "keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it!" repeated Scrooge's nephew. "But you don't keep it."

"Let me leave it alone, then," said Scrooge. "Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!"

"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew. "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be

apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!”

The clerk in the Tank involuntarily applauded. Becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

“Let me hear another sound from *you*,” said Scrooge, “and you’ll keep your Christmas by losing your situation! You’re quite a powerful speaker, sir,” he added, turning to his nephew. “I wonder you don’t go into Parliament.”

“Don’t be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us to-morrow.”

Scrooge said that he would see him—yes, indeed he did. He went the whole length of the expression, and said that he would see him in that extremity first.

“But why?” cried Scrooge’s nephew. “Why?”

“Why did you get married?” said Scrooge.

“Because I fell in love.”

“Because you fell in love!” growled Scrooge, as if that were the only one thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas.

“Good afternoon!”

“Nay, uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?”

“Good afternoon,” said Scrooge.

"I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!"

"Good afternoon!" said Scrooge.

"And A Happy New Year!"

"Good afternoon!" said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk, who, cold as he was, was warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them cordially.

"There's another fellow," muttered Scrooge, who overheard him: "my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam."

This lunatic, in letting Scrooge's nephew out, had let two other people in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off, in Scrooge's office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

"Scrooge and Marley's, I believe," said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?"

"Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years," Scrooge replied. "He died seven years ago, this very night."

"We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner," said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.

It certainly was; for they had been two kindred spirits. At the ominous word "liberality," Scrooge frowned, and shook his head, and handed the credentials back.

"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the Poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir."

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

"And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge. "Are they still in operation?"

"They are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say they were not."

"The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?" said Scrooge.

"Both very busy, sir."

"Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course," said Scrooge. "I'm very glad to hear it."

"Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude," returned the gentleman, "a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.

"You wish to be anonymous?"

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough, and those who are badly off must go there."

"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides—excuse me—I don't know that."

"But you might know it," observed the gentleman.

"It's not my business," Scrooge returned. "It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more tactious temper than was usual with him.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so that people ran about with flaring lights, protesting their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping sky-down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall, became visible and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations afterwards as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. The cold became intense in the main street, at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes and had lighted a great fire in a stager round which a party of ragged men

and boys were gathered warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-pipe being left in solitude, its scorching wings became congealed, and turned to mass this piece of. The brightness of the shops where wools sprigs and berris crackled in the lamp heat, and the windows made pale faces rudely as they passed. Poulterers and grocers' trades became as if enamel, like a glorious pageant with which it was next to impossible to believe that such dull principles as bargain and sale had anything to do. The Lord Mayor, in the strength of the mighty Mansion-house, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor's house would require, and even the little rat, whom he had fined five shillings on the previous Monday for being drunk and a good hungry in the streets, stirred up to-morrow's pudding in his garret, while his lean wife and the cat sallied out to buy the acet.

Aggrieved as was the rat, Picking, scarcely to be longed. If the good Saint Christmas had but nipped the Evil Spirit's nose with a touch of such weather as that, instead of using his familiar weapons, then indeed he would have feared no just purpose. The owner of the scanty young nose growled and mumbled by the hungry cold as bones are gnawed by dogs, stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol, but at the first sound of Scrooge seized the matter with such energy of action, that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog, and even more dangerous frost.

At length the heavy-lid shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an adieu Scrooge dismounted from his stool and acceding, acknowledged the fact to the expectant clerk in the Tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out and put on his hat.

"I will want no day to-morrow, I suppose," said Scrooge.

"If quite convenient, sir."

"It's not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it's not fair. If I was to stop half a crown for it, you'd think I was too hard-used, wouldn't you?"

The clerk smiled faintly.

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don't think *me* too hard-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work?"

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge, buttoning his great coat to the chin. "But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here at the earliest next morning."

The clerk promised that he would; and Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter hanging below his waist for he boasted no great coat, went down a side in Cornhill at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour of its being Christmas-time, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt to play at blindman's-buff.

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern, and having read all the newspapers and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker's book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. They were a gloomy set of rooms, in a lowering pile of building up a yard, where it had so little business to be, that one could scarcely help fancying it must have run there when it was a young house, playing at hide-and-seek with other houses, and forgotten the way out again. It was old enough now and decrepit enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being let out as offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands. The fog and frost so hung about

the black and grey, of the house, that it seemed as if the elements of the weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

Now it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door except that it was very large. It is also a fact that Scrooge had seen it, eight-and-a-half-penny morning, during his whole residence in that place, and so that Scrooge had as little of what is called a key about him as any man in the city of London, even including—which is a hard word—the corporation, a clergyman, and a few others. Let it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley since the last mention of his seven years' dead partner of an afternoon. And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker without its undergoing any intermediate process of change—not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face, I was not in impenetrable shadow as the other objects in the vault were, but had a dusky light about it like a bad object in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead. The hair was roused, stirred, as if by breath or fire, and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That and its wild colour, made it terrible, but its horror seemed to be in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again.

It is said that he was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy. I cannot say that he is true. But except his hand upon the key, he had relinquished himself to staid, waking, and lighted his candle.

He did pause with a moment's irresolution, before he shut the door; and he *did* look cautiously behind it first, as if he had expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's phalanx sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing in the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on, so he saw "Peace, peace," and closed it with a bang.

The sound resounded through the house like thunder. Every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes. He fastened the door, and walked across the hall, and up the stairs, slowly, still muttering his candle as he went.

You may talk vaguely about diving a boat and sex up a groom and flight of stairs, or through a bad young set of Parliament, but I mean to say you might have gotten bearse up that staircase and taken it broadwise, with the splinter bar towards the wall and the door towards the balustrades, and done it easy. There was plenty of width for that, and room to spare, which is perhaps the reason why Scrooge thought he saw a accommodise bearse going on before him in the gloom. Half-a-dozen gas-lamps out of the street wouldn't have lighted the entry too well, so you may suppose that it was pretty dark with Scrooge's dip.

Up Scrooge went, not caring a cotton for that Darkness's cheap and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting room, bedroom, lumber room, &c., as they were, he. Nobody under the table, and under the sofa, a small fire in the grate, spoon and basin ready, and the little saucepan of gruel

Scrooge had a candle in his head upon the table. Nobody under the bed, nobody in the closet, nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a conspicuous attitude against the wall. Chamber room as usual. A fire-grate, old shoes, two hat-boxes, wash-pipe standing in three legs, and a poker.

Scrooge sat at the table and looked at himself in the looking-glass. He was not his custom. He is secured against surprise, he took off his cravat, put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his nightcap, and sat down before the fire to take his gruel.

It was a very low fire indeed; nothing on such a bitter night. He was obliged to sit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. The fireplace was an old one built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles designed to illustrate the Scriptures. There were Adams and Abels, Pharaoh's daughters, Queens of Sheba, Angelic messengers descending through the air on clouds like feather beds, Abrahams, Belshazzars, Apostles putting it to sea in butter boats, andreds of figures to attract his thoughts, and yet the tale of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient Prophet's rod, and swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, with power to shape some picture on its surface from the dissipated fragments of his thoughts, there would have been a copy of old Marley's head on every one.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge, and walked across the room.

After several turns, he sat down again. As he threw his head back on the chair, his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell that hung in the room, and communicated for some purpose now forgotten with a chamber in the highest story of the building. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange inexplicable dread, that

as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly at the outset that it scarcely made a sound, but soon it rang out loudly and so did every bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seemed an hour. The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise deep down below as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains.

The cellar door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise many orders on the floors below then coming up the stairs then coming straight towards his door.

It's humming still," said Scrooge. "I won't believe it."

His colour changed enough, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Up to this coming on, the dying flame leaped up as the light cried, "I know him, Marley's Ghost!" and fell again.

Marley's Ghost

The same face the very same. Marley in his pigtail usual waist coat, tight and boots, the tassels on the great-coating, the five pigtail, and his side-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail, and it was made for Scrooge's observation of it close to the cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent so that Scrooge ob-

seeing him, and looking through his watercoat could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no nose, but he had never believed it until now.

No, nor did he believe it even now. Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him, though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes, and marked the very texture of the holiest kerchief wound about its head and chin, which wrapper he had not observed before, he was still incredulous, and fought against his senses.

"How now?" said Scrooge, cautious and cold as ever. "What do you want with me?"

"Much!"—Marley's voice, no doubt about it.

"Who are you?"

"Ask me who I *was*."

"Who *was* you, then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice. "You're particular, for a *ghost*!" He was going to say "*to a ghost*," but substituted this, as more appropriate.

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."

"Can you—can you sit down?" asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

"I can."

"Do it, then."

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn't know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair, and felt that in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explanation. But the ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

"You don't believe in me," observed the Ghost.

"I don't," said Scrooge.

"What evidence would you have of my reality, beyond that of your senses?"

"I don't know," said Scrooge.

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because," said Scrooge, "all the time affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an indigested bit of beef, a lump of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravity than of gravity about you, whatever you are!"

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, nor did he feel, in his heart, by any means waggish then. The truth is, that he tried to be smart as a means of distracting his own attention and keeping down his terror: for the spectre's voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones.

He sat, staring at those fixed glaz'd eyes, in silence for a moment would pass. Scrooge felt, the very deuce with him. There was something very awful, too, in the spectre's being provided with an internal atmosphere. Of his own Scrooge could not feel it himself, but this was clearly the case: for though the Ghost sat perfectly motionless, his hair, and skirts, and tassels, were still agitated as by the hot vapour from an oven.

"You see this phantom?" said Scrooge, returning quickly to the charge, for the reason was assigned, and wishing, though it were only for a second, to divert the vision's stony gaze from himself.

"I do," replied the Ghost.

"You are not looking at it," said Scrooge.

"But I see it," said the Ghost, "notwithstanding."

"Well," rejoined Scrooge, "I have a right to say so, and be for the rest of my days persecuted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I call you humbug!"

At this the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge fell on his face in his chair to save himself from falling in a swoon. But how much greater was his horror when the phantom taking off the bandage from its head, as if it were too warm to wear, heaved, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast!

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

"Mercy!" he said. "Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?"

"Man of the worldly mind!" replied the Ghost, "do you believe in me or not?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?"

"It is required of every man," the Ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should work abroad among his fellowmen, and move far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—and woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness."

Again the specter raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands.

"You are feared!" said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why?"

"I wear the chain," he bargained in life," replied the Ghost, "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?"

Scrooge trembled more and more.

"Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the string you bear yourself? It was foul as death and as long as this seven Christmases ago. You have laboured on it since. It is a ponderous chain!"

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable; but he could see nothing.

"Jacob," he said, imploringly, "Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!"

"I have none to give," the Ghost replied. "It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what it would. A very little more is all permitted to me. I cannot rest. I cannot stir. I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never wanders beyond our counting-house—mark me: in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole and weary journeys to and fro!"

It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches pockets. Pondering now at the Ghost had said, he did so now; but without lifting up his eyes, or getting off his knees.

His nose had been very slow about it. Jacob Scrooge observed in a business-like manner, though with anxiety and deference.

"Slow!" the Ghost repeated.

"Seven years dead," cried Scrooge. "And travelling all the time!"

"The whole time," said the Ghost. "No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse."

"You travel fast?" said Scrooge.

"On the wings of the wind," replied the Ghost.

"You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years," said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry, and shook its chain so loudly in the dead silence of the night, that the Ward would have been justified in indicting it for a nuisance.

"O! I capture bound, and fourfolded," cried the phantom, "not to know that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures, for the earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working in all this little sphere whatever it may be will find its measure too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused. Yet such was I, till such was I."

"But you were always a gone man of business," said, 'taunted Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"Business!" cried the Ghost wringing its hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

It held up its chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all its unending grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

"At this time of the missing year," the spectre said, "suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted me?"

Scrooge was very much distressed to hear the specter going on at this rate, and began to quake exceedingly.

"Fear me!" cried the Ghost. "My time is nearly gone."

"I will," said Scrooge. "But don't be hard upon me. Don't be flowery, Jacob! Pray!"

How it is that I appear before you—a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have so many a time been beside you many and many a day.

It was not an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"That is no light part of my penance," pursued the Ghost. "I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring it benezer."

"You were always a good friend to me," said Scrooge. "Thank'ee!"

"You will be haunted," resumed the Ghost, "by Three Spirits."

Scrooge's countenance fell almost as low as the Ghost's had done.

"Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?" he demanded, in a faltering voice.

"It is."

"I—I think I'd rather not," said Scrooge.

"Without their visits," said the Ghost, "I cannot repeat to you the path I tread—expect me first to-morrow when the bell has rung."

"Couldn't I have come at once and have it over?" he asked. "I would have been glad to do so."

"Expect me to-morrow night at the same hour—the third upon the next night—when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate."

brute. Look to see me no more, and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us."

When it had said these words, the spectre took its wrapper from the table, and bound it round its head as before. Scrooge knew this by the smart sound its teeth made, when the jaws were brought together by the bandage. He ventured to raise his eyes again, and found his supernatural visitor confronting him in an erect attitude, with its chain wound over and about its arm.

The apparition walked backward from him, and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open.

It beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped.

Not so much by obedience, as by surprise and fear, for in the raising of the hand, he became sensible of confused noises in the air, and distant sounds of lamentation and regret, wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The spectre, after listening for a moment, nodded in the awful dudge and flitted out upon the bleak, dark night.

Scrooge followed to the window, desperate in his curiosity. He looked out.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restlessness, haste, and mourning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few they might be guilty governments, were linked together, none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a

wretched woman with an infant whom I saw below upon a door-step. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere for good in human matters, and had no power for ever.

Whether these creatures faded into mist, or mist enshrouded them, he could not tell. But they and their spirit voices faded together, and the night became as it had been when he stepped home.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was unlocked, as he had locked it, with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the exertion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull conversation of the Ghost, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose, went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

Stave Two

The First of the Three Spirits

When Scrooge awoke it was so dark, that looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque wall of his chamber. He was endeavouring to pierce the darkness with his terror eyes, when the chimes of a neighbouring church struck the four quarters. So he ascribed to the night

To his great astonishment the hours set on from six to seven, and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve, and stopped. Twelve! It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong. An error must have got into the works twelve

He touched the spring of his repeater — correct this most preposterous clock. Its rapid little hand near twelve and stopped

"Why is it impossible?" said Scrooge, "that I can have slept through a whole day and far into the night, without perceiving that anything has happened to the sun, and thus 'stealing a march'?"

The idea being an alarming one, he scrambled out of bed, and groped his way to the window. He was obliged to rub the glass with the sleeve of his dressing-gown before he could see anything, and could see very little. All he could make out was, that it was still very foggy and extremely cold, and that there was no noise of people running to and fro, and making a great stir, as here and there no doubt would have been if it had beaten off bright day, and taken possession of the world. This was a great relief, because "three days after sight of this First of Exchange pay to Mr. Looney or Bearer, George's order," and so forth, would have become a mere "United States' security if there were no other security."

Scrooge went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over and over, and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was, and the more he endeavoured to think, the more he thought.

Marley's ghost bothered him exceedingly. Every time he resolved within himself, after mature inquiry, that it was all a dream, his mind flew back again, like a strong spring released to its first position, and presented the same problem to be worked all through. "Was it a dream or not?"

Scrooge lay in this state until the chime had gone three quarters more, when he remembered, in a sudden, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when he beheld the one who resolved to be awake until the hour was passed; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep, might as well have done so, was perhaps the wisest resolution in his power.

The quarter was so long, that he was more than once convinced he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously, and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear—

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter past," said Scrooge, counting.

"Ding, dong!"

"Half-past!" said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter to it," said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"The hour itself," said Scrooge, triumphantly—and nothing else!"

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow melancholy. One light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside. I tell you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, nor the curtains at his back, but those in which his face was addressed. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, and Scrooge starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, and himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them, as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing on the spur of my own elbow.

It was a strange figure—like a child yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some spectral medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age, and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. The arms were strong and muscular, the hands the same, as if its head were of common strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed,

were, like those upper members, bare. It wore a tunic of the purest white, and round its waist was bound a girdle of gold, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand, and its singular contraption for a winter emblem, had its cross trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprang a single clear ethereal light, which all this was visible, and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its darker moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.

Even thus, though, when Scrooge looked at it with increasing steadiness, was *not* its strangest quality. For as its belt sparkled and glimmered now in one part and now in another, and what was light one instant, at another time was dark, so the figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness, being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty eyes, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body, of which dissolving parts, no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away. And in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again, distinct and clear as ever.

"Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?" asked Scrooge.

"I am."

The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

"Who, and what are you?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

"Long Past?" inquired Scrooge, observing its dwarfish stature.

"No. Your past."

Perhaps, Scrooge could not have told anybody why, if an angel could have asked him, but he had a special desire to see the Spirit in his cap, and begged him to be covered.

"What!" exclaimed the Ghost, "would you so soon put out with worldly hands, the light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions make this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow?"

Scrooge reverently disclaimed all intention to offend or any knowledge of having wantonly "bonneted" the Spirit at any period of his life. He then made bold to inquire what business brought him there.

"Your welfare!" said the Ghost.

Scrooge expressed himself much obliged, but could not help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would have been more conducive to that end. The Spirit must have heard him thinking, for it said immediately—

"Your reclamation, then, I take thee!"

It put out its strong hand as it spoke, and clasped him gently on the arm.

"Rise! and walk with me!"

It would have been an aid for Scrooge to perceive that the weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes, that the bed was warm, and the thermometer a long way below freezing; that he was clad but lightly in his suppers, dressing-gown and nightcap, and that he had a cold upon him at that time. The grasp, though gentle as a woman's hand, was not to be resisted. He rose, not finding that the Spirit made towards the window, or sped his robe in supplication.

"I am a mortal," Scrooge remonstrated, "and liable to fall."

"Bear but a moment thy hand *there*," said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and thou shalt be upheld in more than dust!"

As these words were spoken, they passed through the wall and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold winter day, with snow upon the ground.

"Good Heaven!" said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. "I was born in this place. I was a boy here!"

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and its intentions appeared still present to the old man's sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odours flowing in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes and joys and cares long, long forgotten.

"Your lips are iron-bling," said the Ghost. "And what is that upon your cheek?"

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple, and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

"You recollect the war?" inquired the Spirit.

"Remember it!" cried Scrooge with fervour. "I could walk in blindfold."

"Strange to have forgotten it for so many years," observed the Ghost. "Let us go on."

They walked along the road, Scrooge recognising every gate and post and tree, until a large market town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some raggy ponies now were seen trotting towards them with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other

until the broad fields were so full of merry music that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

"These are but shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "They have no consciousness of us."

The good travellers came on, and as they came Scrooge knew and named them every one. Why was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them? Why did his good eye glisten and his heart leap up as they went past? Why was he blest with gladness when he heard them give each other Merry Christmas, as they parted at cross roads and by-ways, for their several homes? What was merry Christmas to Scrooge? Out upon merry Christmas! What good had it ever done to him?

"The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. "A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still."

Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

They left the high road, by a well remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weathercock surmounted cupola on the roof and a bell hanging out. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes, for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables, and the coach houses and sheds were over-run with grass. Nor was it more retentive of its ancient state, within, for entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors at many rooms, he found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an early sorrow in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up of candle light, and not too much to eat.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made warmer still by a few lighted gas-lamps and stoves. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire, and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

Not a creature was in the house, nor a squeak and scuffle from the mice beneath the paneling, nor a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dormer behind, nor a sigh among the leafless boughs of the despoiled poplar, nor the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, nor, not a crackling in the fire, came fel upon the heart of Scrooge with a soothing influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments, wondering what real and distant to look at, stood outside the window, with an axe stuck in his belt, and leading by the bridle an ass laden with wood.

"Why it's 'Alibaba!'" Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. "It's clear as day to me! 'Alibaba! Yes, yes, I know! One Christmas time when your dear solitary child was left here all alone, he *did* come for the first time just like that. Poor boy 'Alu Valenone' said Scrooge, "and his wild brother, Orson, there they go!" And what's his name, who was put down in his drawers, as deep as the Gate of Damascus, can't you see him? And the Sultan's Groom turned upside down by the Golem, there he is upon his head. Serve him right! I'm glad of it. What business had *he* to be married to the Princess?"

To hear Scrooge expending all the earnestness of his nature on such subjects, in a most extraordinary scene between laughing and

crying, and to see his heightened and excited face, would have been a surprise to his business friends in the city of Dead.

"There's the Parrot!" cried Scrooge. "Green back and yellow tail, with a thing like a porcupine growing out of the top of his head, there he is! Poor Robin Crusoe! He saved him, when he came home again after sailing round the world. Poor Robin Crusoe! Where have you been, Robin Crusoe?" The man thought he was creating, but it wasn't that was the Parrot, you know. There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek. That's a Hoop! Ha, ha!"

Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self: "Poor boy!" and cried again: "Wish!" Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking aside at him, after crawling his eyes with his cuff: "but it's too late now."

"What is the matter?" asked the Spirit.

"Nothing," said Scrooge. "Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something; that's all."

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully and waved its hand, so that as it did so, "Let us see another Christmas!"

Scrooge's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels brown, the windows cracked, fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling, and the naked rafters were shown instead, but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than could be. He only knew that it was quite correct that everything had happened so, that there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone to home for their holiday.

He was not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge looked at the clock-st, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glanced anxiously towards the door.

It opened, and a little girl much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her "Dear dear brother."

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" said the child, clapping her tiny hands, and bending down to laugh. "To bring you home, home, home!"

"Home, little one?" returned the boy.

"Yes!" said the child, breathlessly. "Home, for good and all. Home for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be—at home, like I never! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home, and he said Yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're to be a man!" said the child, opening her eyes, "and are never to come back here, but first, we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

"You are quite a woman, little man!" exclaimed the boy.

She clapped her hands and laughed, and tried to touch his head; but being too little, laughed again, and stood on tiptoe to embrace him. Then she began to drag him, in her childish eagerness, towards the door; and he, nothing loth to go, accompanied her.

A terrible voice in the hall cried, "Bring down Master Scrooge's box there!" and in the hall appeared the school-master himself, who glared on Master Scrooge with a ferocious contumaciousness, and threw him into a dreadful state of mind by shaking hands with him. He then conveyed him and his sister into the veniest and well of a shiver

ing best parrot that ever was seen, where the maps upon the wall, and the celestial and terrestrial globes in the windows were waxen with cold. Here he produced a dejeuner of curiously light wine and a block of curiously heavy cake and administered instruments of torture to the young people at the same time sending out a menage servant to offer a glass of "something" to the postboy who answered that he thanked the gentleman, but if it was the same tap as he had tasted before, he had rather not. Master Scrooge's trunk being by this time pegged on to the top of the chaise, the children back the schoolmaster good bye right willingly and getting "two" drove gallv down the garden sweep the crack wheels dashing the hoar frost and snow from off the dark leaves of the evergreens all spray.

"Always a delicate creature, who a breath might have withered," said the Ghost. "But she had a large heart."

"So she had," cried Scrooge. "You are right. I will not gainsay it. Spirit, God forbid."

"She died a woman," said the Ghost, "and had, as I think, children."

"One child," Scrooge returned.

"Aunt," said the Ghost. "Your nephew."

Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind, and answered briefly, "Yes."

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city where shadowy passengers passed and repassed, where shadowy carts and coaches hurried for the way, and all the stir and tumult of a real city were. It was made plain enough by the dressing of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time again, but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it?" asked Scrooge. "Was I apprenticed here?"

They went in at sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling. Scrooge cried in great excitement:

"Why that old Fezziwig! Bless his heart, it's Fezziwig alive again!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands, adjusted his capacious waistcoat, laughed all over himself from his shoes to his eyes, and then, in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:

"Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

Scrooge's former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow apprentice.

"Dick Wkins, is he sure?" said Scrooge to the Ghost. "Bless me, is there no self? He was very much attached to me, was Dick? Poor Dick! Dear, dear!"

"Yo ho, my boys!" said Fezziwig. "No more work to-night. Christmas Eve! Look! Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up—creaked Fezziwig, with a sharp clap of his hands. "before a man can say Jack Robinson!"

You would have seen how those two fellows went at it. They charged into the street with the shutters—*one, two, three*—had 'em up in their places—*four, five, six*—barred 'em and pinned 'em—*seven, eight, nine*—and came back before you could have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

"Ah!" cried old Fozzwig, skipping down from the high desk, with wonderful agility. "Clear away my ass, and let's have lots of room here! Hullo! Dick! Chirp! Fozzwer!"

"Clear away!" There was nothing they wouldn't have cleared away or couldn't have cleared away, with old Fozzwig noising on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off as if it were dismissed from public life for evermore. The floor was swept and watered; the carpets were renewed, fuel was heaped upon the fire, and the warehouse was as snug and warm, and dry, and bright and roomy as you would desire to sit upon a winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the high desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned the firm stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fozzwig, one vast substantial smile on came the three Miss Fozzwigs, beaming and loquacious. In came the six young fellows whose hearts they broke. In came all the singlens and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having heard enough from his master, making himself behind the girl from next door but one, who was proved to have had her ears pinned by her mistress. In they all came, some after another, some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some passing, some passing on, they all came, and how and ever they always did, all went twenty couples at once, hands but round and back again the other way, down the middle and up again, round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping, old top couples always turning up in the wrong place, new top couples starting off again as soon as they got there, all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to be perceived! Well, in this result was brought about

Fezziwig clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose. But scoring rest, — or, as it appeared, he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter, and he were a brand-new man resolved to beat him out of sight, or perish.

There were more dances, and there were larkies, and more dances, and there was cake and there was negus, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler, an artificial dog, madd. The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him! — struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig, topped up, as it were, with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them, three or four and twenty pair of partners, people who were not to be trifled with, people who *must* dance, and had no notion of walking.

Mr. Fezziwig's Ball

But if they had been twice as many — ah, four times — old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to *her*, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that's not high praise, tell me higher, and I'll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's candles. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted, at any given

time what would have become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance—advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and curtsey, corkscrew, tread-the-needle—and back again to your place—Fezziwig “cut”—cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their partners, one on either side of the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two apprentices, they did the same. Then and there the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds, which were under a counter in the back shop.

During the whole of this time Scrooge had acted like a man that if he wins. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head grew very clear.

“A small matter,” said the Ghost, “to make these six or fours so full of gratitude.”

“Small!” echoed Scrooge.

The Spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their thanks in praise of Fezziwig. And when he had done so, said,

"What is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money—three or four perhaps—on that so much that he deserves this praise?"

"It isn't that," said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously as his former not his latter self. "It isn't that. Spirit! He has the power to render us happy or unhappy, to make our service light or burden, so that it is a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks, in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count them up what they are. The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

He felt the Spirit's glance, and stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked the Ghost.

"Nothing particular," said Scrooge.

"Something, I think," the Ghost insisted.

"No," said Scrooge, "No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That's all."

His former self turned down the lamps as he gave utterance to the wish, and Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

"My time grows short," observed the Spirit. "Quick!"

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom he could see, but it produced an immediate effect. For again Scrooge saw himself. He was once more a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years, but it had begun to wear the signs of care and anxiety. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye, which showed the passion that had taken root, and where the stem was, the growing tree would be.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning dress in whose eyes there were tears which sparkled in the light that shone out of the Christmas Eve.

"It matters little," she said, softly. "I love you very dearly. Another child has displaced me, and I can cheer and comfort you in time to come as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve."

"What child has displaced you?" he rejoined.

"A golden one."

"This is the even-handed dealing of the world," he said. "There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty, and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth."

"You fear the world too much," she answered, gently. "All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations tail off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?"

"What then?" he retorted. "Ever if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed towards you."

She shook her head.

"Am I?"

"Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. You *are* changed. When it was made, you were another man."

"I was a boy," he said impatiently.

"Your own feeling tells you that you were not what you are," she returned. "I am. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart, is fraught with misery now that we are two. How often and

now seems I hope — right — that I will not say. It is enough that *you* have righted it and can release you.

"Have I ever sought release?"

"In words, No. Never."

"In what, then?"

"In a changed nature, in an altered spirit, in another atmosphere of life, say that I hope as its great end. I — everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight — I this had never seen severed from," said the girl, looking madly, but with steadiness, upon him. "And me — would you seek me out and try to win me now? Ah, no!"

He seemed to yield to the force of this supposition, in spite of himself. But he said with a struggle, "You think not?"

"I would gladly think otherwise — I could," she answered, "I leave it to you! When I have earned a truth like this I know how strong and irresistible it must be. But if you were free to day — tomorrow — yesterday — can even I believe that you would choose a powerless girl — one who has put very confidence with her, weigh everything by Gammar's — holding her, but for a moment you were free enough to violate the guiding principle that do so, do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow and release you? With a full heart I can love of him you once were."

He was about to speak, but with her head turned from him, she resumed:

"You may not remember — but what is past — that makes me hope you will — the pain of this. A very, very brief time, and you will dismiss the recollection of it gladly as an unprofitable dream, from which I awakened with that you swore. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

She left him, and they parted.

"Spine!" said Scrooge. "show me no more. Conduct me home. What do you delight to torture me?"

"One shadow more!" exclaimed the Ghost.

"No more!" cried Scrooge. "No more. I don't wish to see it. Show me no more!"

But the relentless Ghost paroled him in both his arms, and forced him to observe what happened next.

They were in another scene, in a large room, not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire sat a beautiful young girl, so like that last that Scrooge believed it was the same one. He saw her now a comely matron sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfect harmony, for there were more children there than Scrooge at his age could stack or mind could count, and unlike the celebrated band in the poem, they were not fifty children concealing themselves like one, but every child was conducting itself like forty. The consequences were uproarious beyond belief, but no one seemed to care, on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed every much and the latter, soon beginning to struggle in the spirits, got pillaged by the young brigands most ruthlessly. What would I not have given to be one of them! Though I never could have seen so rude a no! I wouldn't for the wealth of all the world have crushed that braided hair, and torn it down, and left the precious one free. I wouldn't have poked it off and bless my soul to save my life. As to measuring her waist in sport as they did, being young blood, I couldn't have done it. I should have expected my arm to have grown round it, or a permanent and never come straight again. And yet I should have dearly liked, I own, to have touched her up to have questioned her,

that she might have opened them, to have looked upon the treasures of her dowry chest, and never raised a blush, to have let those waves of hair, an inch of which would be a keepsake beyond price, in short, I should have liked, I do confess to have had the lightest licence of a child, and yet to have been mature enough to know its value.

But now a knocking at the door was heard, and such a rush immediately ensued that she with laughing face and plundered dress was borne towards it the centre of a flushed and boisterous group, just in time to greet the father who came home attended by a man laden with Christmas toys and presents. Then the shouting and the struggling, and the onslaught that was made on the defenceless porter. The scaling him with chairs for ladders to dive into his pockets, to produce him a brown paper parcel, held on tight by his cravat, hug him round his neck, pommel his back, and kick his legs in unrepressible affection. The shouts of wonder and delight with which the development of every package was received. The terrible announcement that the baby had been taken, the act of putting a coal's tray agape into his mouth, and was more than suspected of having swallowed a fictitious turkey, glued on a wooden platter! The immense relief at knowing this a false alarm. The joy and gratitude and ecstacy! They are an indescribable mass. It is enough that by degrees the children and their emotions got out of the parlour and by one stair at a time up to the top of the house, where they went to bed, and so subsided.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentively than ever, when the master of the house, having his daughter leaning fondly on him, sat down with her and her mother at his own fireside, and when he thought that such another creature quite as graceful and as full of

promise might have called him father, and seen a spring time in the haggard winter. His late husband's sight grew very dim indeed.

"Be lie," said the husband, turning to his wife with a smile. "I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon."

"Who was it?"

"Guess."

"Al! a can be lie, can I know?" she asked in the same breath, laughing as he laughed. "Mr Scrooge."

"Mr Scrooge it was. I peered in his office window, and as it was shut up, no he had a candle inside I could scarcely keep seeing him."

"In partnership up to the point of death I hear and here he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe."

"Spirit," said Scrooge in a broken voice, "remove me from this place."

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "That they are what they are, do not blame me."

"Remove me," Scrooge exclaimed, "I cannot hear it."

He turned upon the Ghost, and seeing that it looked upon him with a face in which, in some strange way, there were fragments of all the faces it had shown him, wrestled with

"Leave me! Take me back! Leave me no longer!"

In the struggle it that can be called a struggle in which the Ghost with no visible resistance on its own part was unsubdued by a single effort, its adversary Scrooge observed that its light was turning huge and bright, and dimly conjecturing that with its influence over him he seized the extinguisher-cap and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head.

The Spirit dropped beneath it, so that the extinguisher covered its whole form, but through Scrooge pressed it down with all his force

he could not hide the light which streamed from a jet in an unbroken flood upon the ground.

He was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and, further, of being in his own bedroom. He gave the cap a parting squeeze, in which his hand relaxed, and had barely time to retire before he sank into a heavy sleep.

Stave Three

The Second of the Three Spirits

Awaking in the middle of a prodigious & rough snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bed was again upon the stroke. He felt that he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time, for the especial purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger despatched to him through Jacob Marley's intervention. But finding that he turned uncomfortably cold when he began to wonder which of his curtains this new spectre would draw back, he put them everyone aside with his own hands, and, lying down again, established a sharp look-out all round the bed, for he wished to challenge the

Spirits on the moment of its appearance and did not wish to be taken by surprise, and made nervous.

Confession of the free and easy sort, who pursue enemies or being acquainted with a move or two and being usually equal to the time of day express the wide range of their capacity for adventure by observing that they are good for anything from pitch and toss to manslaughter between almost opposite extremes, no doubt there is a covering of almost a comprehensive range of subjects. With an aversion for strange quarters as far as this, I don't mind calling on your friend but he was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baboon and rhinoceros would have astonished him very much.

Now being prepared for almost anything, he was not in any manner prepared for nothing, and consequently, when the Bell struck Chime and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of tremors, convulsions, tetanuses, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. At this time a lamp on his bed, the very core and centre of a blaze of radiance which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour and which being in a light, was more alarming than a dozen ghosts, as he was powerless to make out what it meant or would be it and was sometimes apprehensive that he might be at that very moment an interesting case of spontaneous combustion, with out having the consolation of knowing it. At last, however he began to think as you or I would have thought at first for it is always the person who in the predicament who knows what ought to have been done next and would unquestionably have done it too—at last, I said he began to think that the source and secret of the ghostly light might be in the adjoining room, from whence an

further tracing it, it seemed to shune. His idea taking full possession of his mind, he got up softly and stole in his supper to the door.

The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove, from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there, and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney as that old purification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of altar, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long writhes of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry and orange apples,

lev oranges, muscovado pears, immense twelve-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In this state upon this table, there sat a poor Giant gazing to see who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in and know me better than!"

Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before this Spirit. He was not the jagged Scrooge he had been, and though the Spirit's eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to meet them.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Present," said the Spirit. "Look upon me!"

Scrooge reverential—did so. It was clothed in the sumptuous green robe or mantle bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loose on the figure, that its capacious breast was bare, as if disdaining to be warmed or protected by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare; and on its head it wore no other covering than a woollen wreath, set here and there with shining needles. Its dark brown ears were long and free, free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its jovial air. Curled round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.

Scrooge's Third Visitor

"You have never seen the like of me before," exclaimed the Spirit.

"Never," Scrooge made answer to it.

"I have never walked forth with the younger members of my family, meaning, for I am very young, my elder brothers born in these later years," pursued the Phantom.

"I don't think I have," said Scrooge. "I am afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, Spirit?"

"More than eighteen hundred," said the Ghost.

"A tremendous family to provide for!" muttered Scrooge.

The Ghost of Christmas Present rose.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge so submissively— "conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is

working now. To-morrow, it will have a right to reach me, or me profit by it."

"Touch my robe!"

Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, hickory, goose, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanished instantly. So did the room, the fire, the radiant glow, the hoarse singing, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where for the weather was severe, the people made a rough, but brisk and not unpleasant kind of music in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses, whence it was made to gleam to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below, and spitting up another snow-storm.

The house fronts looked black enough, and the windows darker, contrasting with the smooth white sheet of snow upon the roofs, and with the darker snow upon the ground, which last deposit had been ploughed up in deep furrows by the heavy wheels of carts and waggons, furrows that crossed and recrossed each other hundreds of times where the great streets branched off, and made intricate channels, hard to trace in the thick, dirty mud and icy water. The sky was gloomy, and the shorter streets were clogged up with a dingy mist, half thawed, half frozen, whose heavier particles descended in a shower of sooty atoms, as if all the chimneys in Great Britain had, by one consent, caught fire, and were blazing away to their dear hearts' content. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavoured to diffuse in vain.

For the people who were shouting a war in the house-tops were
 waving and at the same time calling out to one another from the parapets,
 and now and then even singing a rousing song. The birds—better natured
 missiles far than many a word—were flying round, for they went right
 and not less hearty at it. The poor little things were still
 at it, poor and the traitors were raven in their gory. There were
 great round pots of lead baskets of chestnuts, shelled like the water
 crabs. The old gentlemen, standing at the doors, and turning out
 at the street in their apologetic attitude. There were ladies,
 or women-faced, broad and a little bit of a woman, shining in the fatness
 of their growth like Spanish nurses, and winking from their helms in
 waiting at the girls as they went by, and glanced down at
 the hang-up in the street. There were pears and apples, clustered high
 in oblong pyramids, here were bunches of grapes, made, in the
 shopkeepers' benches, to change from conspicuous books. The
 people's minutes might water grains as they passed, there were pines
 of hibernia, moss and brown, revealing in their fragrance, ancient
 walks among the woods, and the same old things and deep through
 withered leaves, there were North Sea Butters, squat and swarthy, set
 ting off the colour of the oranges and lemons, and in the great com-
 pactness of their waxy persons, larger by entreating and beseeching
 to be carried home in paper bags, and eaten after dinner. The very gold
 and silver to be set forth among these choice fruits in a bowl, though
 members of a dam and a dam, a dam, a dam, appeared to know that
 there was something going on, and, to a fish, went gasping round
 and round their little world in slow and passionless excitement.

The Grouse, the "Crocus" nearly closed, with perhaps two
 shatters down, or one that through those gaps such jumps of it was
 not alone that the scale descending in the corner made a nerve

sound, or that the wine and roller parted company so easily, or that the canisters were rattled up and down like agitating ticks, or even that the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose, or even that the tinsns were so plentiful and rare, the almonds so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon so long and straight, the other spices so delicious, the candied fruits so taked and sported with molten sugar as to make the oldest bakers feel faint and subsequently ill as well. Nor was it that the figs were moist and plump, or that the French plums blushed in modest fairness from their highly-decorated boxes, or that everything was good to eat and in its Christmas dress, but the customers were all so hurried and so eager in the hopeful promise of the day, that they hurried up against each other at the door, crashing their wicker baskets against each other, and dropping their purchases upon the counter, and came running back to fetch them, and committed hundreds of the like mistakes, in the best humor possible, while the Grocer and his people were so frank and fresh that the polished hearts with which they tasted, as their aprons became might have been their own, with outside for general inspection, and for Christmas days to peck at if they chose.

But when the steeples called good people all to church and chapel, and now they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes and with their gayest faces. And at the same time there emerged from scores of bye-streets, lanes and nameless turnings, innumerable people carrying their wares to the makers' shops. The sight of these poor retailers appeared to interest not Spink very much, but he stood with Scribble beside him in a baker's doorway, and taking off the covers as their bearers passed, sprinkled incense on their wares from his torch. And it was a very common kind of torch for once or twice when there were a goodly odds between

some dinner-carriers who had tossed each other, he saw a few drops of water on them from it, and their good humour was restored directly. For they said it was a sovereign quartet upon Christmas Eve, and so it was God love it, so it was.

In time the pots ceased, and the bakers were shut up, and yet there was a general shuddering forth of all these carriers and the progress of their cooking. The thawed touch of wet above each baker's oven, when the pavement smoked as if its stones were cooking too.

"Is there a peculiar flavour in water you sprinkle from your torch?" asked Scrooge.

"There is. My own."

"Would it apply to a kind of dinner on this day?" asked Scrooge.

"To any kind of dinner. To a poor one most."

"Why to a poor one most?" asked Scrooge.

"Because it needs it most."

"Spirit," said Scrooge after a moment's thought, "I wonder how, of all the beings in the many wide worlds, should resist the cramping necessity people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment?"

"It" cried the Spirit.

"You would deprive them of their means of dining every seventh day, often the only day on which they can be said to dine at all," said Scrooge. "Wouldn't you?"

"It" cried the Spirit.

"You seek to close these places on the Seventh day?" said Scrooge. "And it comes to the same thing?"

"I seek!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Forgive me if I am wrong: it has been done in your name, or at least in that of your family," said Scrooge.

"Here are some upon this earth of yours," returned the Spirit, who lay calm to know us, and who saw their deeds of passion, pride, and hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us."

Scrooge promised that he would; and they went on, in spite as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quarry of the Coast which Scrooge had observed at the baker's, that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease, and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully as under a supernatural "tenture," as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall.

And perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit had in showing off this power of his, or else it was his own kind, generous heart-nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk's, for there he went, and took Scrooge with him, knocking to his robe, and on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinkling of his torch. Think of that! Bob had but fifteen "Bob" a week himself; he pocketed on Saturdays at fifteen copies of his Christian name; and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house!

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Cratchit's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a good show for sixpence; and she had the torch, assisted by Betsey Cratchit, second of her daughters, also brave in

visions, while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his trusty stout shirt collar Boobers' property, conferred upon his son and heir in honour of the day into his mouth, rejoiced to find himself so gallantly attended, and carried to show his son in the fashionable Parks. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had snatched the goose and known it for their own, and hasting in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion. These young Cratchits danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he, not proud, although his cockatrice mark checked him, blew the fire, and the slow potatoes bubbling up, knickered mildly at the saucepan-bill to be let out and peeled.

"What has ever got your precious father then?" said Mrs. Cratchit. "And your brother, Tiny Tim? And Martha warn't as late as Christmas Day by half an hour?"

"Here's Martha, mother!" said a girl, appearing as she spoke.

"Here's Martha, mother!" cried the two young Cratchits. "Hurrah! There's *quite* a goose, Martha!"

"Why bless your heart save my dear, how are you are?" said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her with officious zeal.

"Was a deal of work to finish up last night," replied the girl, "and had to clear away this morning, mother!"

"Well, never mind so long as you are come," said Mrs. Cratchit. "Sit down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm. Lord bless 'em!"

"No, no! there's Father coming!" cried the two young Cratchits, who were everywhere at once. "Hark, Martha, hark!"

So Martha held herself—and in came little Bob the father with at least three feet of comforter exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him, and his throatbare cravat jammed up and brushed to nook seasonable, and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. As for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

"Why, where's our Martha?" cried Bob Cratchit, looking round.

"Not coming," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"Not coming?" said Bob, with a sudden accession to his high spirits, for he had been Tiny Tim's good horse all the way from church, and had come home rampant. "Not coming upon Christmas Day?"

Martha didn't like to see him disappointed if it were only in joke, so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hastened Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

"And how did little Tim behave?" asked Mrs. Cratchit, when she had rallied Bob on his credulity, and Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart's content.

"As good as gold," said Bob, "and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard of. He told me coming home that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see."

Bob's voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother

and sister to his stool before the fire, and while Bob, turning up his cuffs— as it prior tell w, they were capable of being made more shabby—compounded some hot mixture in a jug with gin and onions, and stirred it round and round and put it on the hob to simmer. Master Peter, and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in triumph procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds, a feathered phenomenon, to which a black swan was a matter of course. And in truth it was something very like it in that house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy—ready beforehand in a little saucepan—hissing as Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour. Miss Beaudish sweetened up the apple-sauce. Martha washed the hot plates. Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table. The two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, rammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast, but when she did, and when the long expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't achieve there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Fed out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; and as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight to every

ing one small atom of a bone upon the dish, they hadn't ate it all at last! Yet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular, were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows. But now, the plates being changed by Miss Beldice, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone—too nervous to hear witnesses—to take the pudding up and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be done enough. Suppose it should break in turning out! Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back yard, and stolen it, while they were merry with the goose—a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became awed. All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Label! A great deal of steam. The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cat! A smell like an eating-house and a pastry-cook's next door to each other with a laundress's next door to that. That was the pudding! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed, but smiling proudly, with the pudding, like a speckled canton-flap, so hard and brown brazen in half of half a quarter of figured brandy and bedight with Christmas holy stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and so earnestly that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have bushed him-
himself at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the rag being tasted,

and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a roasted turkey came out of the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a circle, and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family dishpan, a glass, two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the best stuff from the larder: however, as well as golden goblets would have done, and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the customers of the fire, his spluttered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed

"A Merry Christmas to us all in many years God bless us!"

Which all the family re-echoed.

"God bless us every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

He sat very close to his father's side upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

"Spirit," said Scrooge with an interest he had never felt before, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live."

"I see a vacant seat" replied the Ghost, "in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die."

"No," said Scrooge. "On no! Kind Spirit! say he will be spared."

"If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race," returned the Ghost, "will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do so, and decrease the surplus population."

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief.

"Man," said the Ghost, "I mean you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant and you have discovered What the surplus is, and Where it is. Will you decide what men shall live what men shall die? It may be that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. Oh God! to hear the insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!"

Scrooge bent before the Ghost's rebuke, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily on hearing his own name.

"Mr. Scrooge," said Bob: "I'll give you Mr. Scrooge the Founder of the Feast!"

"The Founder of the Feast indeed?" cried Mrs. Cratchit, reddening. "I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast up in, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it!"

"My dear," said Bob, "the children! Christmas Day!"

"I should be Christmas Day—I am sure," said she, "not with one drinks the death of such an old, stiff, grumpy, hard unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert. Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow!"

"My dear," was Bob's mild answer, "Christmas Day!"

"I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's," said Mrs. Cratchit, "not for his long life to him. A merry Christmas and a happy new year! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!"

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no earnestness. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn't care twopenny for it. Scrooge was the victim of the tam-

24 The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not lifted for half a minute.

After it had passed away, they were ten times merrier than before from the mere news of Scrooge the Ba' being done with. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtained, full time and sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter's being a man of business, and Peter himself looked thoughtfully at the fire from between his fingers, as if he were considering what particular investments he should favour when he came to the receipt of that bewitching income. Martha, who was a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them what kind of work she had to do, and how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to be abed to-morrow morning but a good long rest to-morrow being a holiday she passed at home. And how she had seen a countess and a lord some days before, and how the countess was much about as tall as Peter—that Peter pulled up his collar so high that you couldn't have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chestnuts and the log were burning and round, and round, and they had a song about a soldier who had travelled up in the snow from Liverpool, who had a plaintive little voice, and sang it very well indeed.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family, they were not well dressed, their shoes were far from being over-polished, their clothes were scanty, and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time, and when they faded and looked happier yet in the bright

sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting. Scrooge had his eye upon them, and respect upon his face, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark, and snowing pretty heavily, and as Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlours, and all sorts of rooms, was wonderful. Here, the flickering of the blaze showed preparations for a cosy dinner, with hot plates baking through and through before the fire, and deep red curtains ready to be drawn to shut out cold and darkness. There all the children of the house were running out into the snow to meet their married sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, and be the first to greet them. Here again, were shadows on the window-panes of guests assembling, and there a group of maid and some girls, all bonneted and hat-coated, and all chattering at once, topped lightly off to some near neighbour's house where, with upon the single man who saw them enter—artful witches, well they knew it—in a glow!

But, if you had judged from the numbers of people on their way to friendly gatherings, you might have thought that no one was at home to give them welcome when they got there. A sea of every house expecting company, and poking up its fires half chimney-high. Blessings on it, how the Ghost exulted! How its breast is breasting its breast, and opened its capacious pail, and floated on, harpounding, with a generous hand, its huge and harmless merry or ever-angry within its reach. The very lamplighter, who ran on before lighting the dusky street with specks of light, and who was dressed as special the evening somewhere, laughed out loudly as the Spirit passed, though little knowing the lamplighter that he had any company, not Christmas!

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about as though it were the last place of glacial age, and water spread itself wheresoever it tasted, or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner, and nothing grew but moss and furze, and coarse rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun had left a streak of fiery red, which gazed upon the desolation for an instant, like a sudden eye, and drawing lower, lower, lower yet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

"What place is this?" asked Scrooge.

"A place where Miners live, who dig coal in the bowels of the earth," returned the Spirit. "But they know me. See!"

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children's children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out gaily in their holiday attire. The old man—a voice that seldom rose above the howling of the wind upon the barren waste—was singing them a Christmas song—it had been a very old song when he was a boy—and from time to time they all joined in the chorus. So sure as they raised their voices, the old man got quite blithe and young, and so sure as they stopped, his vigour sank again.

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his ruler, and passing on above the moor, sped—whither? Not to sea! To sea! To Scrooge's horror, on king back, he saw the east of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it roared and roared, and raged among the

dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

But upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters roared and dashed, the wild year through, there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great reaps of seaweed hung to its base, and storm birds, born of the wind one might suppose, as seaweed of the water—rose and fell about it like the waves they skimmed.

But even here two men who watched the light had made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone wall shone out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their horny hands over the rough table at which they sat, they wished each other Merry Christmas, in their can of grog, and one of them the older one, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard weather, as the figure-head of an old ship might be, struck up a sturdy song that was like a Christmas itself.

Again the Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they agreed on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the lookout in the bow—the officers who had the watch, dark, ghostly figures in their several stations, but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune. It had a Christmas thought or spoke blown in his breath to his companion at some yestern Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it, and every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, had had a kinder word for another on that day than on any day in the year, and had shared to some extent in its festivities, and had remembered those he cared for at a distance, and had known that they delighted to remember him.

It was a great surprise Scrooge, while standing there moaning at the window and thinking what a sad thing it was to move on his night to such darkness over an unknown abyss whose depths were secrets as profound as Death. It was a great surprise to Scrooge while thus engaged to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to him not to recognize it as his own nephew's and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room with the Spirit sitting smiling by his side and looking at that same nephew with approving affability!

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew. "Ha, ha, ha!"

It could hardly happen, by any ordinary chance to know a man more cheerful in a laugh than Scrooge's nephew. As I can say as, I should like to know him too. Introduce him to me and I will give him my acquaintance.

It is a fair, even-handed, honest assessment of things, that while there is grief and disease and sorrow there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour. When Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way holding his sides, rolling his head and twisting his face into the most extravagant contortions Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends, not a bit better-hand, roared out also.

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I have told Scrooge's nephew. "He believed it too!"

"More shame for him, indeed!" said Scrooge's niece indignantly. Bless those women, they never do anything by halves. They are always in earnest.

She was very pretty, exceedingly pretty. With a lumped, surprised-looking, capital face a little more than that seemed made a

be kissed—as no doubt it was, all kinds of gentle caresses about her chin, that melted into one another when she laughed; and the sunniest pair of eyes I ever saw in any little creature's head. Altogether she was what you would have called provoking, you know; but satisfactory, too. (10) perfectly satisfactory.

"He is a capital old fellow," said Scrooge's nephew, "that's the truth, and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offences carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him."

"I'm sure he is very much to be pitied," hinted Scrooge's niece. "At least you always tell *me* so."

"What of that, my dear?" said Scrooge's nephew. "His wealth is of no use to him. He doesn't do any good with it. He doesn't make himself comfortable with it. He hasn't the satisfaction of thinking, 'ha, ha, ha'—that he is ever going to benefit a fellow-creature."

"I have no patience with him," observed Scrooge's niece. Scrooge's niece's sisters, and all the other ladies, expressed the same opinion.

"Oh, I have!" said Scrooge's nephew. "I am sorry for him, I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his unreasonable whims? Himself always. Here he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He doesn't lose much of a dinner."

"Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," interrupted Scrooge's niece. "Everybody else said the same, and they must be allowed to have been competent judges, because *they* had just had dinner and, with the dessert upon the table, were clustered round the fire, by lamplight.

"Well, I'm very glad to hear it," said Scrooge's nephew, "because I haven't great faith in these young housekeepers. What can you say, Topper?"

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge's niece's sisters, for he answered that a bachelor was a wretched outcast, who had no right to express an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge's niece's sister—the pumpkin with the lace tucker, not the one with the roses—blushed.

"Do go on, Fred," said Scrooge's niece, clapping her hands. "He never finishes what he begins to say. I call such a ridiculous fellow!"

Scrooge's nephew recoiled in another agony, and as it was impossible to keep the infection off, though the pumpkin sister menaced to do it with aromatic vinegar, his example was unanimously followed.

"I was only going to say," said Scrooge's nephew, "that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is as nothing, that he loses some pleasant moments, which would do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his morbidly old office, or his dusty chambers. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he takes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't be complaining better of it, I declare, if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year, and saying to old Scrooge, 'how are you?' It only puts him on the ground to leave us poor clerks fifty pounds, *there* something, and I think I shall go to bed to-day."

It was their turn to laugh now at the notion of his shaking Scrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, and not much caring what they laughed at, so that they laughed at any rate, he encouraged them in their merriment, and passed the bottle judiciously.

After tea they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about. When they sang a Carol or Catch I can assure you especially Topper, whose sad groans were like the bass like a grating one and never swelled the large veins in his forehead, or got red in the face. Ever so Scrooge's niece played well upon the harp, and played at long interludes a simple little air, a mere nothing you might learn to whistle in two minutes, which had been familiar to

the child who listened Scrooge from the cradle of sorrow, as he had been reminded with the Ghost of Christmas Past. When this strain of music sounded, all the things that he had shown him came upon his mind, he softened more and more, and thought that if he could have listened to it often years ago, he might have cultivated the kindnesses of life for his own happiness with his own hands, with out resorting to the sex on a spade that suited Jacob Marley.

But they didn't devote the whole evening to music. After a while they played at Fortlets for it is good to be victorious sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty influence was around himself so plentiful. There was first a game at Lord Marley's half. Of course there was. And I don't re-venue Topper was real. And then I believe he had eyes in his boots. My impression is, that it was a coming off between him and Scrooge's nephew, and that the Ghost of Christmas Present knew it. The way he went after that poor sister in the late chapter was an outrage on the creature of human nature, knocking down the fire irons, hanging over the chairs, bumping against the piano, smothering himself among the curtains wherever she went, there went he. He always knew where the piano was or was. He would catch anybody else. If it had fallen up against him, as some of them did in pique, he would have made a return of it, even out of his size, which would have been in affront to

that understanding and would instantly have walked off in the direction of the plump sister. She often cried out that it wasn't fair, and it really was not. But when, at last, he caught her, when, in spite of all her sudden stings and her rapid flatterings past him, he got her into a corner whence there was no escape, then his conduct was the most excusable. For, as pretending not to know her, his pretending that it was necessary to touch her head-dress, and further to assure himself of her identity by pressing a certain ring upon her finger, and a certain chain about her neck, was vain demonstration! No doubt she had a very fair opinion of it, when another blind man being in office, they were so very confidential together behind the curtains.

Scrooge's niece was not one of the blind-man's buff party, but was made comfortable with a large chair and a footstool, in a snug corner, where the Ghost and Scrooge were close behind her. But she smiled in the darkness and loved her uncle to admiration with all the fervors of the affection, unknown to the game of Low. When, and Where, she was very great, and to the secret joy of Scrooge's nephew, bore her sisters to Low, though they were sharp girls too, as Tuppert could have told you. There might have been twenty people there, young and old, but they all played, and so did Scrooge, for would it not be in the interest it had in what was going on, that his voice made no sound in their ears? He sometimes came out with his guess, quite good, and very often guessed quite right, too; but the sharpest needle, best Whetstone, warranted not to cut in the eye, was not sharper than Scrooge's blind as he took it in his head to be.

The Ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood, and looked upon him with such favour, that he begged, like a boy, that he should be allowed to stay until the guests departed. But this the Spirit said could not be done.

"Here is a new game," said Scrooge. "One half hour, Spirit only, one!"

It was a Game called Yes and No, where Scrooge's nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what he only answering to their questions yes or no, as the case was. The brisk fire of questioning to which he was exposed, excited from him that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal that growled and gnawed sometimes, and talked sometimes, and lived in London and wandered about the streets and wasn't made a show of and wasn't coddled by anybody and didn't live in a menagerie and was never killed in a market and was not a horse, or an ass, or a cow, or a bull, or a tiger, or a dog, or a pig, or a cat, or a bear. At every fresh question he was put to him, this nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter, and was so impressibly obliged that he was obliged to get up off the sofa and stamp. At last the plump sister, taking into a similar state, cried out

"I have found it out. I know what it is, I do! I know what it is."

"What is it?" cried Fred.

"It's your Uncle Scro-o-o-o-ogel!"

Which it certainly was. Admiration was the universal sentiment, though some objected that the reply to "Is it a bear?" ought to have been "Yes," inasmuch as an answer in the negative was sufficient to have covered their tracks from Mr. Scrooge, supposing they had ever had any tendency that way.

"He has given us plenty of merriment. I am sure," said Fred, "and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. Here is a glass of mulled wine ready to our hand at the moment, and I say, Uncle Scroogel!"

"Well, Uncle Scrooge!" they cried.

"Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is," said Scrooge's nephew. "He wouldn't take it from me but may he be at it nevertheless!" cried Scrooge."

Then Scrooge had imperceptibly become so grey of heart that it would have pained the unmerciful company in return, and thanked them in an inaudible speech, if the Ghost had given him time. But the whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew, and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and there were cheerful foreign lands, and they were close at home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope by poverty and lowly habit. In prison, too, he stood, and jail in misery's every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority had not made fast the door, and barred the Spirit out. He left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It was a long night, if it were only a night, but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas Holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time the pair passed together. It was strange to remark that Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew older & calmer. After Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it, when they left a children's Twelfth Night party where, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was grey.

"Are spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"Quite upon his globe is very brief," replied the Ghost. "It ends to-night."

"To-night!" cried Scrooge.

"To-night at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near."

The chimes were ringing the three quarters past eleven at that moment.

"Forgive me if I am not satisfied," was asked Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit's robe, "but I see something strange and not belonging to yourself protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?"

"It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it," was the Spirit's sorrowful reply. "Look here."

From the foldings of its robe it brought two children, wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet and clung upon the outside of its garment.

"Oh, Man! look here. Look, look, down here!" exclaimed the Ghost.

They were a boy and girl. Yellow meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish, but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a sallow and shrivelled hardness of age, and pain, and punishment, had punched and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity in the grave, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, was monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. "Having them shown to him in this way," he tried to say, "they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a tale of such enormous magnitude."

"Spirit, are they ever free?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that awful writing, which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it?" cried the Spirit, stretching out his hand towards the city. "Sanctify those who are true to it! Adorn it for your Father's purposes, and make it worse. And bid the end."

"Have they no refuge or resource?" cried Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. "Are there no workhouses?"

The bell struck twelve.

Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and, lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.

Stave Four

The Last of the Three Spirits

The Phantom slowly, gracefully, silently approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knee, and the very air through which this Spirit moved, it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this, it would have been difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.

He felt that it was an awful state, when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread, and knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

"I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come?" said Scrooge,

The Spirit answered that it pointed onward with its hand.

"You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us," Scrooge pursued. "Is that so, Spirit?"

The upper portion of the garment was contracted for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had inclined its head. That was the only answer he received.

Although well used to ghostly company by this time Scrooge feared the silent shapes so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. The Spirit paused a moment, as observing his condition, and giving him time to recover.

But Scrooge was all the worse for this. It shrouded him with a vague uncertain horror, to know that beneath the dusky shroud, there were ghostly eyes steadily fixed upon him, while he, though he stretched his own to the utmost, could see nothing but a spectral hand and one great heap of black.

"Ghosts of the future!" he exclaimed. "I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purposes are to do me good, and as I hope to see the better man from what I was, I am prepared to bear your company, and do so with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

"Lead on," said Scrooge. "Lead on!" The night is waning fast and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit!"

The Phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, he thought, and carried him along.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city, for the city rather seemed to spring up about them and encompass them of its own act. But there they were, in the heart of it, on 'Change, amongst the merchants, who hurried up and down and clinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, and looked at their watches, and smiled thoughtfully with their great good senses, and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The Spirit stopped beside one of the knot of business men (observing that the hand was pointed to them). Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

"No," said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, "I don't know much about it, either way. I may know he's dead."

"When did he die?" inquired another.

"Last night, I believe."

"Why, what was the matter with him?" asked a third, taking a big quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff box. "I thought he'd never die."

"God knows," said the first, with a yawn.

"What has he done with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose that looked like the bill of a turkey cock.

"I haven't heard," said the man with the large chin, yawning again. "Left it to his company, perhaps. It doesn't entitle me to say what's all I know."

This peasantry was received with a general laugh.

"It's not to be a very cheap funeral," said the same speaker, "for I don't like to know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?"

"I don't mind going if a lady is provided," observed the gentleman with the extended ear in his nose. "But I must be asked to make one."

Another laugh

"Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all," said the first speaker. "I never wear black gloves, and I never eat alone." But I must be going, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I'm not at all sure that I wasn't his most particular friend, for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye, bye."

Speakers and listeners strolled away and mixed with other groups. Scrooge knew the men, and moved towards the Spirit for an explanation.

The Phantom guided him into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Scrooge listened again, thinking that the explanation might be here.

He knew those men, also, perfectly. They were men of business, very wealthy, and of great importance. He had made a point always of standing well in their esteem, in a business point of view, that is, strictly in a business point of view.

"How are you?" said one.

"How are you?" returned the other.

Well, said the first. "Oh, Scrooge has got his own at last, hey?"

"So I am told," returned the second. "Could isn't it?"

Seasonable for Christmas time. You see that a skater, I suppose?"

"No. No. Something else to think of. Good morning."

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirits should attach so much to conversations apparently so trivial, but feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. They could scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that was Past, and this Ghost's province was the Future. Nor could he think of any one immediately connected with himself, to whom he could apply them. But nothing coming that to whomsoever they applied they had some latent moral for his own improvement, he resolved to treasure up every word he heard, and everything he saw, and especially to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared. For he had an expectation that the conduct of his future self would give him the clue he missed, and would render the solution of these riddles easy.

He looked about in that very place for his own image, but another man stood in his accustomed corner, and though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes that poured in through the Portals, or gave him the surprise, however, for he had been revolving in his mind a change of life, and thought and hoped he saw his new-born resolutions carried out in this.

Quiet and dark, beside him stood the Phantom, with its outstretched hand. When he roused himself from his thoughtfulness, he fancied from the turn of the hand, and its position in reference to himself, that the Unseen Spirits were looking at him keenly. It made him shudder, and feel very cold.

They left the busy scene and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated but to which he re-

congenial situation, and its bad repute. The ways were broad and narrow, the shops and houses stretched, the people half-naked, drunken, squalid, ugly. Awe and awe was a sick and many diseases, jagged their offences of small and dirt and life upon the struggling streets, and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with terror, and misery.

Farther down, at infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beer and ship-brew, a pent-house rookery where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy stuff were brought upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, wrights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinize were bred and hidden in nooks and corners of unseen things, masses of corrupted fat and sepulchres of bones sitting in among the war-shed debris, by a charcoal stove made of old bricks, was grey-haired Fagol, nearly seventy years of age, who had screened himself from the cold air without, by a frosted curtaining of muslin, and as others hung upon a stool, and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scruggs and the Phantom came into the presence of this man, just as a woman with a heavy burden slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered, when another woman, similarly laden, came in behind her, and she was closely followed by a man in faded black, who was no less startled by the sight of them than they had been upon the recognition of each other. After a short period of blank astonishment in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh.

The charcoal-man alone to be the first, cried she who had entered first, "Let the landlady alone to be the second, and let the

undertaker's man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, there's a chance! If we haden all three met here without meaning it.

"You couldn't have met in a better place," said old Joe, turning his pipe from his mouth. "Come into the parlour. You were made free of it long ago, you know, and the other two and I strangers. Stop all I shut the door to the shop. Ah! how it squeaks! There ain't such a rusty bit of metal in the place as its own hinges. I believe, and I'm sure there's not such old bones here as mine. Ha, ha! We're all suited to our trading, we're well matched. Come into the parlour. Come into the parlour."

The parlour was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together with an old stair rod, and, having trimmed his smoky lamp, for it was night, with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

While he did this, the woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor, and sat down in a haughty manner on a stool, crossing her elbows on her knees, and looking with a cold defiance at the other two.

"What odds then? What odds, Mrs. Disher?" said the woman. "Every person has a right to take care of themselves, it always did."

"That's true indeed!" said the landlady. "No man more so."

"Why then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who's the wiser? We're not going to pick a quarrel with either of these, I suppose?"

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Disher and the man together. "We should hope not."

"Very well then," cried the woman. "That's enough. Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Dilber, laughing.

"If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, a wicked old screw," pursued the woman, "why wasn't he nautical in his stipend? If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of wing gasping out his last there alone by himself."

"That he might were that ever was spoke," said Mrs. Dilber. "It's a judgment on him."

"I wish it was a still heavier judgment," replied the woman, "and I should have seen you may depend upon it, if I could, have hid my hands in anything else. Open the bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I'm not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it. We know pretty well that we were helping ourselves, before we met here. I believe it's no sin. Open the bundle, Joe."

But the gallantry of her friends would not allow of this, and the man in faded black, mounting the breach first, produced *his* plunder. It was not extensive. A shawl or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons, and a brooch of no great value were all. They were severally examined, and appraised by old Joe, who chalked the sums he was disposed to give for each, upon the wall, and added them up into a total when he found there was nothing more to come.

"That's your account," said Joe, "and I would I give another sixpence if it was to be hoded for not doing it. Who's next?"

Mrs. Dilber was next. Sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old tash-meal silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Her account was stated on the wall in the same manner.

"I always give too much to ladies. It's a weakness of mine, and that's the way I run myself," said old Joe. "That's your account. It

you asked me for another penny and made it an open question. I'd repent of being so liberal and knock off that a-crow!"

"And now undo my bundle, Joe," said the first woman.

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening it, and having fastened a great many knots, dragged out a large and heavy roll of some dark stuff.

"What do you call this?" said Joe. "Bed-curtains!"

"Ah!" returned the woman, laughing and leaning forward on her crossed arms. "Bed-curtains!"

"You don't mean to say you look 'em down, rings and all, with him lying there?" said Joe.

"Yes I do," replied the woman. "Why not?"

"You were born to make your fortune," said Joe. "and you'll certainly do it."

"I certainly shan't hold my hand, when I can get anything in it by reaching it out, for the sake of such a man as He was. I promise you," Joe returned the woman coolly. "Don't drop that roll upon the blankets, now."

"His blankets?" asked Joe.

"Whose else's do you think?" replied the woman. "He isn't likely to take cold without 'em, I dare say."

"I hope he didn't die of anything catching," said old Joe, stopping in his work, and looking up.

"Don't you be afraid of that," returned the woman. "I ain't so fond of his company that I'd enter about him for such things, if he did. Ah, you may look through that shirt till your eyes ache, but you won't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine one too. They'd have wasted it if it hadn't been for me."

"What do you call wasting of it?" asked old Joe.

"Putting it on that," he bristled up, no less sure, replied the woman with a laugh. "Somebody was thin enough to do it, but I took it off again. It can't be any good enough for such a purpose, it isn't good enough for anything. It's quite as becoming to the body. It can't look uglier than he did in that one."

Scrooge started at this adoption in horror, as they sat grouped about their spool, in the scanty light afforded by the old parlor lamp. He viewed them with a detachment and disgust, which could hardly have been greater though they had been oil scene demons marketing the corpse itself.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the same woman, when old Joe, producing a flannel bag with money in it, laid out for her several guineas upon the ground. "That is the end of it, you see! He has ruined every one away from him when it was his chance to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Spirit," said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot, "I see I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. Ah, he tells that was now Merely a lesson, what is this?"

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a dead white face, unclothed head, in which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language.

The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glanced round at its obscurity to a secret impulse, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light rising in the water and reflecting upon the bed, and on the powdered and bereft, watched, unwept, unthought for was the body of this man.

Scrooge gazed itwards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the sight

est raising of a finger from Scrooge's part, would have disclosed the fact. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, at length tried to do it, but had no more power to withdraw the veil than to dismiss the spectre at his side.

O'er him, on a rigid, dreadful Death-set throne arrayed, and dressed it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command, for thus is thy dominion. But of the loved, revered, and honoured dead, thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, nor make one feature odious.

It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are so altered as the hand was open, generous, and true, the heart brave, warm, and tender, and the pulse a man's. Strike Shadow-stroke! nor see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal.

No voice pronounced these words in Scrooge's ears, and yet he heard them when he looked upon the bed. He thought that this man could be raised up now, who would be his foremost antagonist. Advance! hard dealing, gripping career! They have brought him to a rich end, truly.

He lay in the dark empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child to say that he was kind to me in this or that, and for the memory of one kind word I will be kind to him. A cat was tearing at the door, and there was a sound of gnawing rats beneath the hearth-stone. What horrid waited in the room of death, and why they were so restless and disturbed, Scrooge did not care to think.

"Surrender!" he said. "this is a terrible place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go!"

Now the Ghost pointed with an animated finger to the head.

"I understand you," Scrooge returned, "and I would do it if I could. But I have not the power. Spirit, I have not the power.

Again it seemed to look upon him.

"If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by this man's death," said Scrooge, who again said, "show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you!"

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment like a wing, and withdrawing it, revealed a room by daylight, where a mother and her children were

She was expecting some one, and with anxious eagerness, for she walked up and down the room, started at every sound, looked out from the window, gazed at the clock, tried, but in vain, to work with her needle, and could hardly bear the voices of the children in their play.

At length the long-expected knock was heard. She hurried to the door, and met her husband, a man whose face was careworn and depressed, though he was young. There was a remarkable expression in his face—a kind of serious delight, of which he felt ashamed, and which he struggled to repress.

He sat down to the dinner that had been hardening for him by the fire, and when she asked him faintly what news, which was not told after a long silence, he appeared embarrassed how to answer.

"Is it good?" she said. "or bad?" to help him.

"Bad," he answered.

"We are quite ruined!"

"No. There is hope yet, Caroline."

"It is certain," she said, amazed. "there is. Nothing is past hope if such a miracle has happened."

"He is past repenting," said her husband. "He is dead."

She was a mild and patient creature if her face spoke truth, but she was too kind in her soul to bear it, and she said so, with clasped

hands. She prayed forgiveness the next moment and was sorry, but the first was the emotion of her heart.

"What the half-dried Ken woman whom I told you of last night said to me, when I tried to see him and obtain a week's delay and what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me turns out to have been quite true. He was not only very ill, but dying, then."

"To whom will our debt be transferred?"

"I don't know. But before that time we shall be ready with the money, and even though we were not, it would be a bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep to-night with light hearts, Caroline."

Yes. But then, as they would, their hearts were lighter. The children's faces, hushed and clustered round to hear what they so aptly understood, were brighter, and it was a happier house for this man's death! The only emotion that the Ghost could show them, caused by the event, was one of pleasure.

"Let me see some tenderness connected with a death," said Scrooge—for that dark chamber, spirit, which he felt just now, will be for ever present to me."

The Ghost conducted him through several streets familiar to his feet, and as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere was he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratchit's house, the dwelling he had visited before, and found the mother and the children seated round the fire.

Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in sewing. But surely they were very quiet!

"And he took a chair, and set him in the midst of them."

Where had Scrooge heard those words? He had not dreamed them. The boys must have read them out, as he and the Spirit crossed the threshold. Why did he not go in?

The mother had her work upon the table, and put her hand up to her face.

"The colour hurts my eyes," she said.

The colour? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

"They're better now again," said Cratchit's wife. "It makes them weak by candle light, and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home for the word. It must be near his time."

"Faster rather?" Peter answered, shutting up his back. "But I think he has walked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, mother."

They were very quiet again. At last she said, and in a steady, cheerful voice, that only faltered once—

"I have known him walk with—I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed."

"And so have I," cried Peter. "Often."

"And so have I," exclaimed another. "So have all."

"But he was very light to carry," she resumed, intent upon her work, and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble or trouble now—here's your father at the door!"

She hurried out to meet him, and little Bob in his comforter—he had needed it, poor fellow—came in. His tea was ready for him on the hob, and then all tried what they could to help him to comfort. Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid each a little cheek against his face as if they said, "Don't mind it, father. Don't be grieved!"

Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Cratchit and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday, he said.

"Sunday! You went to-day, then, Robert?" said his wife.

"Yes, my dear," returned Bob. "I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little child!" cried Bob. "My little child."

He broke down all at once. He could not help it. If he could have helped it, he and his child would have been farther apart perhaps than they were.

He left the room, and went upstairs to the room above which was lighted cheerfully, and hung with Christmas. There was a chair set close beside the child, and there were signs of some one having been there, lately. Poor Bob sat down in it, and when he had thought a little and composed himself, he kissed the little face. He was reconciled to what had happened, and went down again quite happy.

They drew about the fire, and talked; the girls and mother working still. Bob told them of the extraordinary kindness of Mr. Scurry's nephew, whom he had scarcely seen but once, and who, meeting him in the street that day, and seeing that he looked a little— "just a little down, you know," said Bob, inquired what had happened to distress him. "Oh, nothing," said Bob, "for he is the pleasantest spoken gentleman you ever heard of. I told you I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit," he said, and heartily sorry for your good wife. By the bye, how he ever knew *that*, I don't know.

"Knew what, my dear?"

"Why that you were a good wife," replied Bob.

"Every body knows that," said Peter.

"Very well observed, my boy," cried Bob. "I hope they do. Heartily sorry," he said, "for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way," he said, giving me his card, "that's where I am. Pray come to me. Now it wasn't," cried Bob, "for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way that this was quite judging that it really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us."

"I'm sure he is a good soul," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"You would be wiser not to let my dear," returned Bob, "if you saw him, spoke to him, she would not be at all surprised—mark what I say!—if he got Peter a better situation."

"Only hear that, Peter!" said Mrs. Cratchit.

"And then," cried one of the girls, "Peter will be keeping company with some one, and setting up for himself."

"Get along with you," retorted Peter, grinning.

"It's just as well as that," said Bob. "One of these days, though, there's plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim—shall we?—or this fine partridge that there was among us?"

"Never, father!" cried they all.

"And I know," said Bob, "I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how kind it was, although he was a little little child, we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it."

"No, never, father!" they all cried again.

"I am very happy," said little Bob. "I am very happy."

Mrs Cratchit kissed him, his Daughters kissed him, the two young Cratchits kissed him, and Peter and himself shook hands. Spirit of Tiny Tim, thy childish essence was from God.

"Spectre," said Scrooge, "something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead?"

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come conveyed him, as before, though at a different time he thought indeed there seemed no other in these latter visions, save that they were in the Future—into the resorts of business men, but showed him not himself. Indeed, the Spirit did not stay for anything, but went straight on as it had and just as desired, until he might be Scrooge to tarry for a moment.

"This court," said Scrooge, "through which we hurry now is where my place of occupation is, and has been for a length of time. I see the house. Let me be told what I shall be, in days to come!"

The Spirit stopped, the hand was pointed elsewhere.

"The house is yonder," Scrooge exclaimed. "Why do you point away?"

The inexorable finger underwent no change.

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not Joseph. The Phantom pointed as before.

He joined it once again, and wondering why and whether he dared, accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. He paused to look round before entering.

A graveyard. Here, then, the wretched man whose name he had now to learn lay underneath the ground. It was a worthy place.

Walled in by houses, overrun by grass and weeds, the growth of vegetation—death, not life, choked up with so much burying, far with repleted appetites. A worthy place!

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to one. He advanced towards it trembling. The Phantom was exactly as it had been, but he dreaded it as he saw new meaning in its solemn shape.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be only?"

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, which if per-severed in, they must lead to," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

The Spirit was immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went, and following the finger read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name—Ebenezer Scrooge.

The Last of the Spirits

"Am I that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, upon his knees. The finger pointed from the stone to him, and back again.

"No, Spirit! Oh no, no!"

The finger still was there.

"Spirit," he cried, right clutching at its robe. "hear me. I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been out for this intercourse. Why show me thus, if I am past all help?"

For the first time the light appeared to shake.

"Good Spirit," he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it. "Your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may salvage these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!"

The kind hand trembled.

"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

In his agony he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit stronger yet, repulsed him.

He clung up his hands in a last prayer to have his sins forgiven, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's head and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

A C H R I S T M A S C A R D .

Stave Five

The End of it

Yes! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the time before him was his own, to make amends in.

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled into bed. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. O! Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees!"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intention, that his broken voice would scarce answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down," cried Scrooge, pulling one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are

here—they were—the shadows of the things that would have been, if he would have been like the other two. I know they will."

His hands were busy with his garters all this time, pulling them loose and putting them on, and down, and pulling them, musing them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

"I don't know what I do," cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath, and making a perfect hurricane of himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy, I am as glib as a greased man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! I am here! Whoop! Hooray!"

He had tumbled into the strong room, and was now standing there perfectly winded.

"There's the saucy parrot that the goose was in!" cried Scrooge, starting up, and going toward the fireplace. "There's the door by which the Christmas tree always enters! There's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present sat! There's the window where I saw the wandering spirits! It's all right, it's all true, it all happened! Ha ha ha!"

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid effort, and a most amusing laugh. The latter, in a long, long line of brilliant laughs.

"I don't know what day of the month it is," said Scrooge, "I don't know how long I've been among the spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a little mad, whoop! hooray! here!"

He was the best in his transition by the churches ringing out the loudest peals he had ever heard. Clang, clang, hammer, clang, clang, bell, bell, clang, clang, hammer, clang, clang. O, glorious, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist, clear, bright, cold, starry; cold, cold, piping for the blood to dance in. Golden sunlight. Heavenly sky, sweet fresh air, merry bells. Oh, glorious! Glorious!

"What's to-day?" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

"He!" returned the boy, with a mischievous twinkle.

"What's to-day, my fine fellow?" said Scrooge.

"To-day?" replied the boy. "Why Christmas Day."

"It's Christmas Day?" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done that in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!"

"Hallo!" returned the boy.

"Do you know the Poulterers, on the next street but one, at the corner?" Scrooge inquired.

"I should hope I do," replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy!" said Scrooge. "A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize turkey that was hanging up there?—Not the little prize turkey, the big one?"

"What the line as big as me?" returned the boy.

"What a delightful boy!" said Scrooge. "It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!"

"It's hanging there now," replied the boy.

"Is it?" said Scrooge. "Go and buy it."

"Walk-er!" exclaimed the boy.

"No, no," said Scrooge, "I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell 'em to bring it here, that I may give them the directions where to take

it. Come back with the man, and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with a pot o' less—in five minutes and I'll give you half-a-crown."

The boy was off like a shot. He must have had a steady hand, a finger who could have got a short off hairs so fast.

"I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's!" whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands and spitting with a laugh. "He sha'n't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Foulson. The Master never made such a joke as sending it to Bob's will he!"

The hand on which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but wrote it he did somehow, and went down stairs to open the street door ready for the coming of the porter's man. As he stood there waiting his arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

"I shall have it, as long as I live!" cried Scrooge, patting it with his hand. "I scarce ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face! It's a wonderful knocker!—clever the Turkey! Ah! Whoop now for you, Merry Christmas!"

Then a Turk! He never could, he stood upon his legs, that bird. It would have snapped him short off in a minute like sticks of sealing-wax.

"Why it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town," said Scrooge. "You must have a cab."

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were not to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled to be cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much, and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you are at it. But if he had cut the end of his nose off

he would have put a piece of sticking plaster over it, and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself in his best, and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present, and walking with their hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, "Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!" And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the happy sounds he had ever heard, these were the sweetest in his ears.

He had not gone far when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who had walked into his counting-house the day before, and said, "Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?" It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met, so he knew what part he aving struck before him, and he took it.

"A very dear sir," said Scrooge, quickening his pace, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. "How do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday—it was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir!"

"Mr Scrooge?"

"Yes," said Scrooge. "That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness"—here Scrooge whispered in his ear—

"Lord bless me!" cried the gentleman, as if his breath were taken away. "My dear Mr Scrooge, are you serious?"

"If you please," said Scrooge. "Not a farthing less. A great many back payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favour?"

"My dear sir" said the other, shaking hands with him. "I don't know what to say to such munificence—"

"Don't say anything, please" retorted Scrooge. "Come and see me. Will you come and see me?"

"I will," cried the old gentleman. And it was clear he meant to do it.

"Thank ee," said Scrooge. "I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!"

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could give him pleasure. He had never dreamed that an walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew's house.

He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did.

"Is your master at home, my dear?" said Scrooge to the girl. "Nice girl. Very."

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he, my love?" said Scrooge.

"He's in the dining-room, sir, along with mistress. I'll show you up-stairs, if you please."

"Thank ee. He knows me," said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. "I'll go in here, my dear."

He turned a gentian, and sidled vs face round the door. They were looking at the table, which was spread out in great array, but these young housekeepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

"Fred!" said Scrooge

Dear heart alive! how his niece by marriage started! Scrooge had forgotten. For the moment, about her sitting in the corner with the footstool, or he would not have done it on any account.

"Why bless my soul!" cried Fred, "who's that?"

"It's I, Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Fopper when *he* came. So did the plump sister when *she* came. So did every one when *they* came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, wonderful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early there! If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it, yes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was told eighteen minutes and a half he would be there. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come into the Tank.

His hat was off before he opened the door. His comforter to his chin was on his stool, as if, driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

"Hallo!" growled Scrooge in his accustomed voice, as near as he could feign it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Bob. "I'm behind my time."

"You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes, I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please."

"It's only once a year, sir," pleaded Bob, appearing from the Tank. "It shall not be repeated." "Was making rather merry yesterday, sir?"

"Now, I'll tell you what my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," he continued, clapping him on his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back to the Tank again, "and therefore I am about to raise your salary!"

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it, holding him, and calling to the people in the Court for help and a strong waistcoat.

"A merry Christmas, Bob!" said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. "A merrier Christmas, Bob—my good fellow—than I have given you, for many a year. I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop. Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal scuttle before you get another! Bob! Cheer up!"

Scrooge was better than his word. He said it, and did it, and did it more. And then, to the two little boys, who did not care how he was a second father to them, he became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them. For he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be true anyway, he thought it as well that they should wink up their eyes in

gins, as have the medals in less attractive forms. His own heart
 laughed; and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, he lived upon the
 Great Abstinence Principle ever afterwards, and it was a wise idea. At
 last, that he knew how to keep Christmas well. It gave him more pos-
 sessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us. And
 so, as my own observer, God bless us, Every One!

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L37280-000009610
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